

## Caring for your stone surfaces

MAINTAINING LUSTER AND SHINE ON GRANITE COUNTERTOPS AND OTHER NATURAL STONE SURFACES

### FAMILY FEATURES

Many homeowners install granite or marble countertops and vanities for their durability and to add more value to the home. But in the end, nothing beats the most visible benefit — that rich shine and luster right after the workmen install the new natural stone.

It's that gorgeous shine homeowners desire to maintain. For some, their lustrous granite or marble surfaces are the envy of dinner guests. For others, it's a feeling of frustration and disappointment, most likely due to lack of knowledge and education on maintaining the life and beauty of natural stone. While literally solid as a rock, natural stone isn't impervious to wear and tear, and it requires correct and regular care and maintenance. It's important to understand the shine on granite is not from applying a wax, but a natural shine that goes through a rigorous process.

Quarried from the earth's surface using a combination of diamond wire cables, drills and even dynamite, these stone blocks weigh in at around 40,000 pounds. The blocks are then taken to a factory for processing. A giant gang saw using diamond blades slices the blocks into a calibrated thickness similar to a giant bread slicer. The next step is over to a polishing line where they pass under diamond polishing heads that apply thousands of pounds of pressure per square inch. Here, finer and finer grits bring out the natural polish of the stone. From there the slabs are bundled and shipped to your local stone manufacturer and installer to be further cut to a homeowner's needs. It's this factory finish that enhances their inherent characteristics — veins,

swirls, crystals — prior to installations in kitchens and baths.

There are two common routes to pursue to maintain natural stone's durability and to ensure that brilliant shine persists. One option is contracting with a stone restoration specialist. These professionals can clean, seal and polish your natural stone. This does, however, come with a formidable price tag — north of \$250 to \$500 a visit. A more palatable option is the do-it-yourself route. There's a lower price tag, less than \$50, with more of an investment in a homeowner's time and attention.

"But do your homework first," cautions Lenny Sciarrino, a third-generation stone care expert and co-founder of Granite Gold brand stone care products. "Common household cleaning products can damage granite, marble and other natural stone, and that can lead to costly repair and replacement."

He also warns homeowners to be wary about misleading promises with some do-it-yourself granite cleaning products claiming they can remove stains and water marks or reduce dullness and scratching.

"Having grown up manufacturing, installing and restoring stone surfaces, I can assure you an off-the-shelf granite cleaner can't deliver on those promises," said Sciarrino. "In most circumstances, there are home remedies, and we're often teaching homeowners those tricks over the phone or through email."

To maintain that rich shine from when the stone was first installed, Sciarrino advises homeowners make sure the granite or marble is sealed upon installation. It's not uncommon for a new counter to be installed without a protective seal, leaving it

immediately susceptible to stains and etches. After installation, he said, plan a regular routine of daily cleaning and frequent polishing.

"Although granite, marble and other natural-stone surfaces are highly durable, they do require proper care and maintenance," said Sciarrino, whose company recently introduced Granite Gold Clean & Shine, which fuses the cleaning and polishing strengths of the brand's two most popular products in one solution for those who are on the go. "The additional benefits of polishing these stone surfaces are that it helps resist fingerprints and water spots and it reinforces the protective seal."

Homeowners should often test the integrity of the protective seal, even scheduling it like they do when changing batteries twice yearly at daylight saving time. Here's an easy way to do that: Pour water (about 3 inches in diameter) on the surface in several locations and let it sit for 30 minutes. If you see a dark mark or ring, the water is penetrating the stone and it's time to reseal.

### Protect your stone investment

Beyond the basics, stone care expert Lenny Sciarrino offers some additional tips for caring for your natural stone kitchen and bathroom surfaces:

- Don't use everyday household cleaners, as they can be too harsh on stone and lead to costly repair or replacement.
- Seal regularly for the best protection. Have a stone backsplash? It's just as important to seal.
- Keep stone floors safe with mats and regular damp mopping to catch abrasive particles that can scratch the surface. Lift, don't drag, furniture to avoid risk of scratching floors. Don't polish floors — they



Many homeowners install granite or marble countertops and vanities for their durability and to add more value to the home. (Photo courtesy of Getty Images)

will become too slippery and will risk injury.

- Polish regularly (except stone floors) to increase the shine, color and beauty of your stone and reinforce its protective seal.
- Use safe-on-stone scrubbing pads and brushes when cleaning natural stone.
- Polishing stone shower walls adds protection to help prevent etching, water spotting and soap scum build up.
- Keep grout lines clean by using a cutting board on food-prep surfaces.
- Water spots on stone surfaces can be gently scraped off with a razor blade. Regular sealing and polishing will keep water spots from sticking to the surface. Water should bead on the surface when the stone is sealed.
- Common disinfectants can damage natural stone surfaces, leading to costly repair and replacement. Look for a safe-on-stone disinfectant.

### Simple stain removal steps

While many people believe that stains are impossible to remove from granite and other natural stone surfaces, there are simple steps you can take to remove or reduce these unsightly blemishes.

### Oil Stains (vegetable, olive and other types of cooking oils)

Mix baking soda with acetone into a paste to the consistency of pancake batter and place onto the stained area. Allow the paste to sit for 24 hours, then remove and rinse with water. Repeat if necessary; some stains may require two or three attempts. Reseal the stone surface once this is completed.

### Organic Stains (food products, mold, mildew, plant runoff, dirt and soil, pet urine)

Take a paper towel, cotton balls or white terry cloth towels soaked in any brand of liquid bleach and place it on the stained area. Allow it to sit for 24 hours and rinse with water. Repeat if necessary. You can also spray bleach on stained areas, scrub with a soft nylon brush and then rinse with water. Bleach does not harm natural stone as long as it is rinsed each time and sealed properly after the process is completed.

### Rust Stains

Most rust stains have to be removed by a professional. Pour or spray 3 or 4 percent hydrogen peroxide on the stained area and agitate with a safe-on-stone scrubbing pad or nylon brush (also safe on stone). Allow to sit for 24 hours, then rinse with water.

